

Chapter 5: Plan Implementation

New and Existing Projects

This Comprehensive Conservation Plan outlines an ambitious course of action for the future management of Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and Wetland Management District. It will require considerable staff commitment as well as funding commitment to acquire more wildlife habitats, to maintain existing public use facilities and to develop additional high-quality public use facilities. The Refuge will continually need appropriate operational and maintenance funding to implement the objectives in this plan.

The following paragraphs provide a brief description of the highest priority Refuge and District projects (Tier 1), as chosen by the Refuge staff. The projects are organized by the proposed funding sources, traditional funding through the Refuge Operating Needs System (RONS) or financial support by the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust. A full listing of unfunded Refuge and District projects and operational needs can be found in Appendix C.



Photograph by Scott Sharkey

Refuge Operating Needs (Tier 1 of RONS)

Improve Maintenance of Visitor Facilities: The Refuge administers a state-of-the-art visitor and education center within a one hour drive of 3 million people. In addition, the Refuge manages a variety of outdoor facilities such as kiosks, boardwalks, nature trails, parking lots, and environmental education shelters. Funding is needed to hire a full-time maintenance worker to maintain public use facilities. Better public facilities maintenance will help ensure a top quality experience for refuge visitors. Estimated cost: \$65,000 annually.

Inventory and Control Spread of Exotic Species: Consistent with the Exotic Species Control Plan, we are seeking to control the spread of exotic species such as leafy spurge, purple loosestrife, and European buckthorn on Refuge lands. Among other items, the project will inventory and monitor the presence of invasive species. Where possible, exotics will be controlled using integrated pest management. Mechanical and limited use of chemical treatment will supplement the use of biological control agents. This will be an ongoing effort and will be completed in partnership with the MnDNR and others. Estimated cost: \$75,000 annually.

Wetland District Operating Needs (Tier 1 of RONS)

Hire a Full Time Maintenance Worker: This individual will assist in restoring over 500 acres of wildlife habitat each year on existing and future Refuge and District lands. Likewise, the employee will assist in managing approximately 3,000 acres of restored grasslands on Waterfowl Production Areas and easements. Weed control on these lands will benefit many species of wildlife as well as providing public hunting opportunities. Habitat restoration will be completed in partnership with many local conservation organizations and challenge grant programs. Estimated cost: \$65,000 annually.

Improve Visitor Access to District Lands: A maintenance worker will be hired to construct and maintain entrance signs, boundary signs, parking lots and boundary fences for Waterfowl Production Areas. Construction of these facilities will improve visitor access to these District units. Estimated cost: \$65,000 annually.

Hire a Senior Wildlife Biologist: This employee will be responsible for all biological programs and activities of the Refuge and the District. The biologist will conduct a new, long-term monitoring program to determine the response of grassland-dependent species to native grass restoration on waterfowl production areas and easements in the District. The biologist will make recommendations for future management, restoration and acquisition of important grasslands and other habitats. Estimated cost: \$90,000 annually.

Hire a Full-time Law Enforcement Officer: The addition of this position will improve public education and understanding of Refuge laws and regulations relating to migratory bird management. Through this project, a law enforcement officer will work on the Refuge and with easement landowners and WPA neighbors to ensure that they understand their role in protecting the migratory bird habitat on these important lands. The officer will also be responsible for increased migratory waterfowl enforcement. Estimated cost: \$100,000 annually.

Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust Projects

The following high priority projects have been identified as mitigation activities to be funded through the Trust account. As discussed in Chapter 4, approximately 20 percent of the Trust, and earnings generated thereof, will be spent on public use facilities such as an environmental education center, trails, wildlife interpretive sites, and associated support facilities. In addition, a portion of the Trust will be made available for planning and operations. However, under no circumstances should funds from the Trust be used to replace or supplant the Refuge's existing operational funds.

Construct Rapids Lake Environmental Education Center or Classroom Modules on Refuge Units: Through use of Trust funds, an environmental education center will be planned and developed for the Rapids Lake Unit or individual classroom modules will be built on several Refuge Units. As of February 2002, refuge staff and local educators were discussing the advantages of either option. An education facility would include two classrooms, exhibit space, a multi-purpose room, a small theater, and office space for no fewer than six employees and six volunteers and/or interns. The classroom module option would include smaller facilities on at least the Bloomington Ferry, Upgrala and Rapids Lake units. These classrooms would be used by local educators on a more informal basis and would not house permanent staff. Estimated cost: \$3,000,000

Construct Residence at Rapids Lake Unit: A modern home will be constructed on the Rapids Lake Unit to ensure the safety and well being of facilities and equipment located on the site. Although the area is near a large urban population, the site is remote and subject to a variety of problems including theft, vandalism and arson. Local law enforcement personnel do not have ready access to this property to provide any major deterrent to illegal trespass and activities. The home would be occupied by a Refuge employee with law enforcement authority who would oversee the area and provide the extra margin of safety and protection. Estimated cost: \$175,000

Convert Historic Home into Environmental Education Site: Through use of Trust funds, the Rapids Lake historic home will be converted into an environmental education site. Included in this project will be the replacement of the structure's utilities and the flood proofing of its basement. Upon completion, the home will be used by school groups and others for programs and meetings. Estimated cost: \$350,000

Construct Intern Housing on or near Rapids Lake Unit: To support the Refuge's expanded environmental education and wildlife interpretive programs, intern housing capable of accomodating 16 individuals will be constructed on or near the Rapids Lake Unit. Both interns and volunteers will be housed in this facility. Estimated cost: \$350,000

Hire Park Ranger and Staff for Rapids Lake Environmental Education Center: Through the use of Trust funds, one employee will be hired to plan and coordinate the construction of the Rapids Lake Environmental Education Center and support facilities. Following their construction, up to two additional staff will be employed to provide environmental education programs to area schools. Estimated cost: \$250,000 annually.

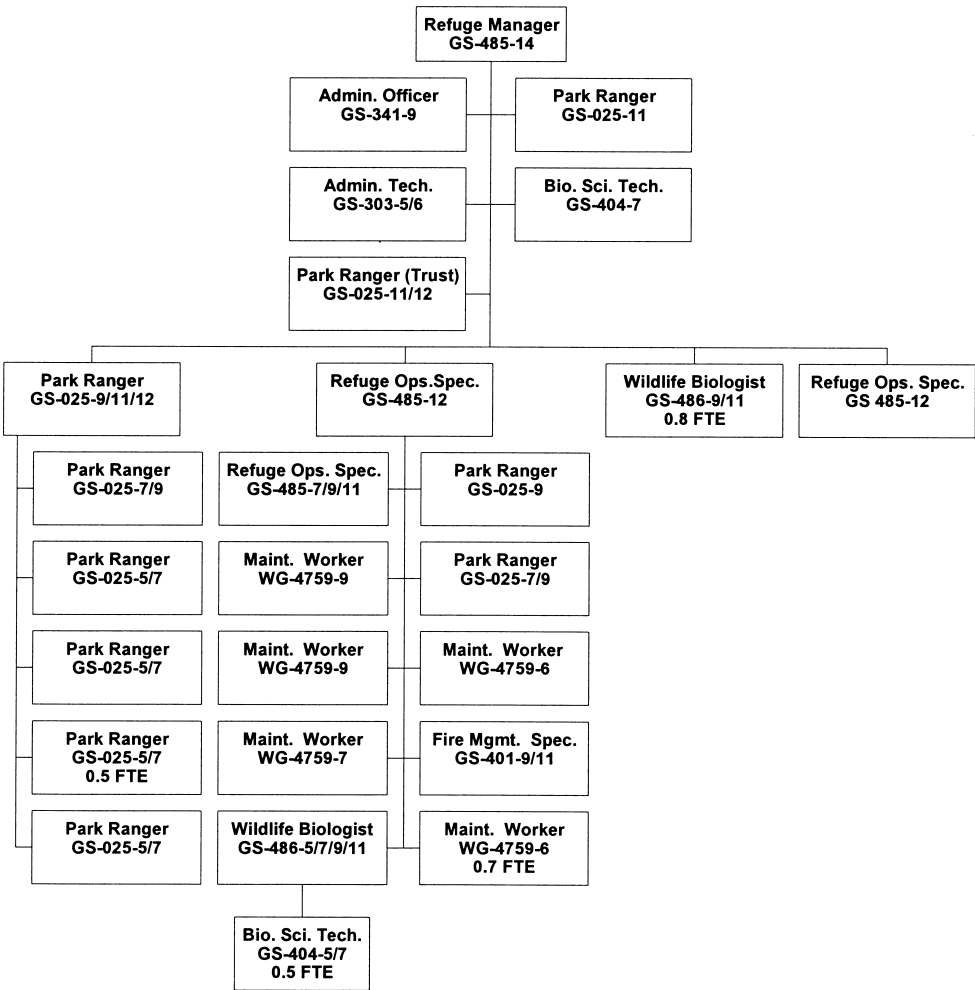
Future Staffing Requirements

Implementing the vision set forth in this CCP will require changes in the organizational structure of the Refuge and District. Existing staff will direct their time and energy in new directions and new staff members will be added to assist in these efforts. The following are organizational charts and tables of the current staff of the Refuge and District, Fiscal Year 2002, as well as and a staff needed to fully implement this plan by Fiscal Year 2017 (Table 2, Figure 18, and Figure 19).

Table 2: New Positions Needed to Fully Implement the CCP

Position	Full-time Equivalent (FTEs)
Deputy Refuge Manager	1.0
Senior Wildlife Biologist	1.0
Contract Specialist	1.0
Administrative Technician	0.5
Park Ranger	3.0
Maintenance Worker	4.0
Total	10.5

Figure 18: Minnesota Valley NWR Organizational Chart, 2002



Partnership Opportunities

Partnerships have become an essential element for the successful accomplishment of Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge goals, objectives, and strategies. The objectives outlined in this Comprehensive Conservation Plan need the support and the partnerships of federal, state and local agencies, non-governmental organizations and individual citizens. This broad-based approach to managing fish and wildlife resources extends beyond social and political boundaries and requires a foundation of support from many organizations and people. Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge will continue to seek creative partnership opportunities to achieve its vision for the future.

The Friends of the Minnesota Valley, a non-profit organization comprised of Refuge supporters from many walks in life, has been an important ally and Refuge advocate in the past and will become an increasingly important partner in the future. This association

Figure 19: Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Organizational Chart, 2017

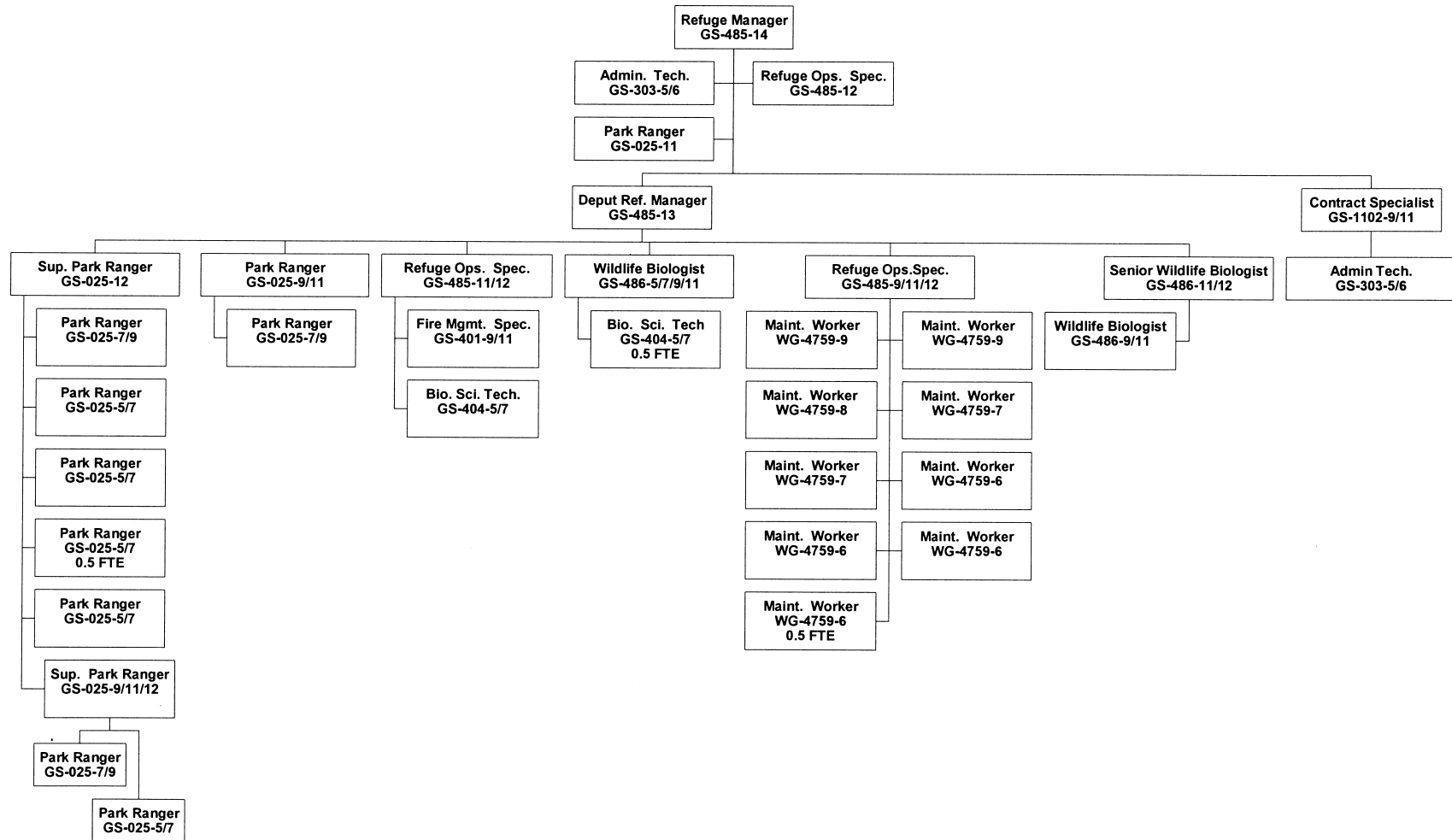


Table 3: Step-down Management Plan Schedule

Plan	Date Completed	Anticipated Revision
Resource Inventory Plan	2000	Dynamic document – Revisions Ongoing
Refuge Interpretive Plan	1994	2003
Law Enforcement Plan	2000	2005
Water Management Plan	1999	2004
Forest Management Plan	–	2005
Hunting Plan	1986	2005
Fire Management Plan	2002	2007
Accessibility Plan	–	2004
Cultural Resources Management Plan	–	2006

has demonstrated its ability to reach out to the community for support and assistance for Refuge projects and conservation issues. Refuge staff will continue to seek guidance, support, and assistance from the Friends into the foreseeable future.

Other notable partners include the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter, the Minnesota Waterfowl Association, the Minnesota River Joint Powers Board and the MnDNR. Conservation organizations and agencies who have been very supportive of habitat restoration efforts on both private and public lands in the District include Minnesota Pheasants, Pheasant Forever chapters, and the Metropolitan Council.

Step-down Management Plans

Several step-down management plans describe specific actions that support the accomplishment of Refuge objectives. The management plans identified in Table 3 will be reviewed and revised as necessary to achieve the results anticipated in this Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The direction set forth in this CCP plus specifically identified strategies and projects will be monitored throughout the life of this plan. On a periodic basis, the Regional Office will assemble a station review team to visit Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge and evaluate current Refuge activities in light of this plan. The team will review all aspects of Refuge and District management, including direction, accomplishments and funding. The goals and objectives presented in this CCP will provide the baseline from which this field station will be evaluated.

Plan Review and Revision

The CCP for the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge is meant to provide guidance to refuge managers and staff over the next 10-15 years. However, the CCP is also a dynamic and flexible document and several of the strategies contained in the plan are subject to such things as drought, floods, windstorms and other uncontrollable events. Likewise, many of the strategies are dependent upon Service funding for staff and projects. Because of all these factors, the recommendations in the CCP will be reviewed periodically and, if necessary, revised to meet new circumstances.